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Mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the United Nations system was requested to mainstream the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development throughout its work. The two progress reports submitted since then indicated that such efforts would result in better support to Member States in their pursuit of sustainable development. The reports also highlighted that mainstreaming the three dimensions ultimately consisted of harnessing synergies and created opportunities that advanced sustainable development through the policies and programmes of the United Nations, as well as averted unintended or conflicting impacts, priorities and outcomes. The present report highlights the role of the sustainable development goals at the core of the post-2015 development agenda and their potential to inject new impetus for embracing integrated approaches to development and to marshal a range of existing policy tools and guidance for collaboration. The report examines accelerated efforts within the inter-agency work of the United Nations system to prepare for the new universal development agenda, building on collective efforts that successfully leveraged acceleration towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The sustainable development goals can also prepare the United Nations for

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enhanced support at the country level, including through concerted efforts to adapt strategic plans and frameworks, core instruments that drive sustainable development approaches in its work and thinking. The report highlights future reviews of the United Nations system, including through closer bonds with existing evaluation functions, as a critical component of assessing progress against the post-2015 development agenda. Lastly, the report presents conclusions and provides a set of recommendations.

I. Introduction

1. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, Heads of State and Government renewed global commitment to sustainable development and outlined a broad vision that identifies poverty eradication as the greatest challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for achieving sustainable development.

2. Heads of State and Government agreed that, in order to accomplish that vision, sustainable development should be mainstreamed at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognizing their interlinkages.

3. In the outcome document of the Conference, entitled "The future we want" (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), Heads of State and Government called for the further mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the work of the United Nations system, thereby asking the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system to approach their own work from a sustainable development perspective. Member States reiterated that call in 2013 and 2014 and invited the Secretary-General to continue to report to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, on progress made, including for the consideration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The present report was prepared pursuant to that request.

4. The efforts of the United Nations system to mainstream economic, social and environmental dimensions are particularly relevant at a time when the international community is elaborating a post-2015 development agenda with the sustainable development goals at its core. The United Nations must be ready to help Member States to implement and review that agenda, which will be transformative, integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions and apply to all countries.

5. The sustainable development goals proposed by the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals provide significant opportunities for change. Because of the way in which they are designed, they can accelerate the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions in the policies and actions of all development actors, including the United Nations system. That was the intention of world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, when they stated that the sustainable development goals contributed to the achievement of sustainable development and served as a driver for implementation and mainstreaming of sustainable development in the United Nations system as a whole.

6. The sustainable development goals framework can thus bolster efforts already under way within the United Nations system to effectively support a balanced and integrated implementation of the goals. Such initiatives are ongoing at the international, regional and country levels across and within organizations but can be scaled up with intergovernmental guidance and support.

7. The present report builds on the two previous reports of the Secretary-General on mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development (A/69/79-E/2014/66 and A/68/79-E/2013/69).

II. Sustainable development goals as a driving force for integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions

8. In 2014, following roughly 18 months of intergovernmental consultations, the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals proposed a set of sustainable development goals. The goals would incorporate the Millennium Development Goals and become the reference objectives for the international community for the period 2015-2030. In its resolution 68/309, the Assembly decided that the Working Group's proposal "shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered".

9. The proposed goals constitute an ambitious agenda covering a much broader range of issues than the Millennium Development Goals. They aim to be applicable to all countries, not only to developing countries, and to serve as guideposts for a transition to sustainable development.

10. What makes the agenda transformative is also its foundation in a people-centred, rights-based approach to development, pursuing aspirations to eradicate poverty irreversibly, tackle discrimination and inequality and ensure that "no one is left behind". This universal agenda integrates dimensions related to peaceful societies underpinned by effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. It requires a paradigm shift in development thinking. The ambition to leave no one behind will require better identification of vulnerable groups and understanding of the risks that those groups are facing. Implementing the agenda will require building linkages between development and other areas, such as humanitarian action. Actions must be underpinned by human rights and the rule of law and engage all development actors. They will need to recognize the relationship between economic, social and environmental dimensions.

11. Lack of integration across sectors in terms of strategies, policies and implementation has long been perceived as a major obstacle to achieving sustainable development. Insufficient understanding of and accounting for trade-offs, interlinkages, synergies and benefits across sectors have at times resulted in incoherent policies, adverse impacts of some sector-specific development policies and, ultimately, diverging outcomes and trends across broad objectives for sustainable development.

12. An internationally agreed framework of goals and targets has great value for the international community and the United Nations system. As a tool for monitoring and reviewing sustainable development progress, the goals and targets are a common benchmark against which progress can be assessed, as well as the basis for cooperation and mutual review. For development institutions, the sustainable development goals can be expected to provide a framework based on which policy and action will be recentred on achieving human well-being and reducing inequality. They should inspire and help to shape strategies, policies and actions by Governments in rich and poor countries, as well as by the range of development actors. The Millennium Development Goals produced a similar normative effect in international development cooperation institutions.

13. The structure of the set of sustainable development goals, as put forward by the Open Working Group, has implications for policy integration and coherence across areas. The sustainable development goals and targets refer to multiple goals

and sectors. of the 107 targets in the proposal of the Open Working Group that are not related to means of implementation, more than half are explicitly cross-cutting, which means that they refer to at least one other goal. Many targets even link three or more different goals. This may facilitate integration and policy coherence across sectors, in particular for the United Nations system. Such links among goals through the targets may also facilitate real mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development, particularly around such themes as sustainable consumption and production.

14. In designing and monitoring their work on the sustainable development goals, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes concerned with a specific goal (e.g. education, health, economic growth) will therefore need to take into account targets that refer to other goals. Given the broad ownership of the goals, this may provide a stronger incentive than in the past for cross-sector, integrated and collaborative work. Similarly, to evaluate progress under the sustainable development goals, it will be necessary to look at multiple goals concurrently and in an integrated fashion.

15. For example, health is covered by goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), which includes 13 targets (4 of which relate to means of implementation). Eight targets under goals 2, 6, 11 and 12 also explicitly refer to health in their wording. Those targets can be referred to as "extended" targets for goal 3, as opposed to the "core" targets listed under that goal. Arguably, institutions concerned with the health sector and operating within the framework of the sustainable development goals will have to consider both core and extended targets when designing, implementing and monitoring policies.

16. Another feature of the sustainable development goals that may enable cross-sector dialogue and greater policy coherence can be found in the broad formulation of goal 2, which adds to traditional targets on hunger explicit references to land management, agricultural production methods and ecosystems. Such connections may encourage development actors to make closer links between agriculture, nutrition, food security and ecosystems much more than in the past.

17. The proposed sustainable development goals include two stand-alone goals: on inequality (goal 10) and on sustainable consumption and production (goal 12). The inclusion of those two cross-cutting dimensions, which are at the very heart of sustainable development, in the set of sustainable development goals confers them with high visibility. The formulation of targets under goals 10 and 12 link the two to many of the other goals, virtually ensuring that those two concepts emerge as the most heavily interlinked themes in the sustainable development agenda.

18. With regard to goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), links with goal 6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all) are provided under target 6.3, on water quality, and target 6.4, on water-use efficiency and freshwater. Importantly, sustainable consumption and production is linked with goal 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) through target 8.4, on improving global resource efficiency in consumption and production.

19. With regard to the issue of inequality in goal 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), many relevant targets are listed under other goals. Of particular note is the strong link with inequality in goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive

societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels) and goal 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere). Most of the links between goals 10 and 1 are provided through targets on universal access to energy, water, health, housing and green space and equal access to resources, which are concurrently listed under other goals.

20. Inequality and sustainable consumption and production have often suffered from not having strong sectoral anchoring in international development institutions. For instance, sustainable consumption and production has suffered from weak integration with other areas of work, and resource efficiency considerations in various sectors were often lost in development strategies and policies. Operationalizing the sustainable development goals will require actors from many different sectors to address sustainable consumption and production targets under their goals, which may ultimately enable greater integration of sustainable consumption and production across the board.

21. Notwithstanding the enabling features built into the sustainable development goals, integrating the various dimensions of sustainable development into strategies and policy advice across the United Nations system will not happen automatically. Integration of thinking and policy advice, including capacity-building, represents a challenge to "business as usual". At times, the fragmented funding structure hinders collaboration. Joining efforts and cooperation towards achieving common goals are necessary to ensure policy integration. The quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system provided important recommendations in that regard. Several initiatives to spur greater collaboration and integrated thinking throughout the United Nations system are ongoing.

III. Readying the United Nations system to support the post-2015 development agenda

22. The first report of the Secretary-General (A/68/79-E/2013/69) identified important building blocks for mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the United Nations system. Those include commitment at the highest level bolstered by intergovernmental guidance, and stronger coordination and policy coherence. Also critical are adequate institutional support, analytical capacity-building and mobilization and allocation of resources to drive sustainable development.

23. Strong mandates pertaining to the mainstreaming of sustainable development already exist. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the United Nations system was called upon to mainstream the three dimensions of sustainable development in its work. This was echoed in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, which similarly recognized the role and comparative advantage of the United Nations system in advancing the integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. In its most recent resolution on the subject, the Assembly encouraged the United Nations system to promote sustainable development outcomes through strengthening normative and operational linkages. At the summit on the post-2015 development agenda, to be held

in September 2015, it is expected that the United Nations system will be called upon to support the implementation of the agenda.

24. The United Nations institutional architecture for promoting and reviewing sustainable development is in place and was reformed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. At the Conference, the overarching role of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in integration and in coordinated follow-up to all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields was reaffirmed. The integration segment of the Economic and Social Council is becoming a platform in which to discuss options for coordinated and integrated policies.

25. Also at that Conference, the high-level political forum on sustainable development was created as an important platform for leadership, guidance, recommendations and review of sustainable development commitments, including the sustainable development goals. It was confirmed, as was done at the most recent quadrennial comprehensive policy review, that the regional commissions had an important role to play in prioritizing sustainable development initiatives through their normative and operational support work, as well as in facilitating regional reflection and policymaking through annual regional forums on sustainable development.

26. The various intergovernmental platforms, along with the vast number of United Nations system intergovernmental bodies, have contributed to elaborating the post-2015 development agenda. They will now provide guidance on how to address some of the major implications of the new agenda for the United Nations system. The Economic and Social Council dialogue on the long-term positioning of the United Nations system in the context of the post-2015 development agenda will provide important directions. Coherent intergovernmental guidance can encourage initiatives launched by the United Nations system to prepare for supporting the implementation of the agenda.

A. Making the United Nations system fit for transformation

27. In his synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda, entitled "The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet" (A/69/700), the Secretary-General noted that a United Nations system that was "fit for purpose" to deliver on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda was one that must provide specialized advice when requested and be equally adept at ensuring an integrated approach and committed to working more collaboratively to leverage the expertise and capacities of all its organizations in support of sustainable development.

28. The Economic and Social Council holds dialogues and events involving Member States and all relevant stakeholders, which represent a very important opportunity to reposition the United Nations development system to play a critical role and maximize its comparative advantages in support of sustainable development. The main message of the dialogue held in February 2015 underlined how the United Nations development system needed to respond coherently in linking the normative, standard-setting and operational dimensions of United Nations work, which would require new thinking and new approaches to work models and financing to guarantee operational effectiveness.

29. Work has already been undertaken in the context of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The Board has been reflecting on how the United Nations system should transform itself to best support Member States in delivering on an integrated and universal agenda. It has focused its reflections on five interconnected elements of sustainable development: universality, equality, human rights, integration and data.

30. The Board also examined the capacity and readiness of the United Nations system to help to deliver the new sustainable development agenda and become more effective and efficient in supporting the achievement of development results. At the core of its deliberations was an understanding that the emerging agenda required a whole-of-system approach. It has reflected on how to better coordinate action on programmatic, operational and management issues across the system. Leveraging institutional synergies and complementarities would facilitate a coherent integration of policies across the three dimensions of sustainable development and contribute to the effective implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

31. The CEB exercise is already leading to concrete actions. The High-level Committee on Programmes is now looking more specifically at sustainable urbanization, climate change and youth employment in order to identify measures to deepen policy coherence, system-wide coordination and engagement with other stakeholders with a view to better supporting Member States in those areas.

32. The United Nations Development Group, through a newly created working group on sustainable development, is reflecting on possible new approaches for rallying system entities around programme countries towards the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. Such approaches would entail: (a) mainstreaming, that is, helping countries to integrate the post-2015 development agenda in their national, regional and local plans for development; (b) acceleration, by helping to target resources in priority areas for achieving the post-2015 development agenda; and (c) policy support, by making sure that the skills and expertise available in the system are made available to countries in a timely and cost-effective manner. The strategy would entail efforts to raise awareness of the agenda, support countries' analysis of their own policies and bolster their capacity to review progress. Member States will be kept informed of progress in implementing initiatives in future reports and reporting in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.

B. Context for pursuing environmental and social sustainability

33. In his 2013 and 2014 reports, the Secretary-General noted the framework for advancing environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations system as a further entry point for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the United Nations system. The framework was endorsed in September 2012 by the Environment Management Group, the United Nations inter-agency coordination body on environmental issues. It provides a basic architecture for integrating environmental and social sustainability measures into the United Nations system at three levels: (a) internal strategies and policies; (b) operational activities, by means of programmes and projects; and (c) administrative decisions, such as on facilities management.

34. Two and a half years after its endorsement, the framework is being applied throughout various parts of the system, although implementation is not yet widespread. Further efforts are needed to promote its full implementation.

35. It was for that purpose that the Environment Management Group developed an interim guide to raise awareness of measures that could be adopted by individual organizations, clarify financial and institutional implications and help entities across the United Nations system to learn from each other's experiences in advancing environmental and social sustainability.

36. The Environment Management Group also initiated a pilot project to assist five agencies, representing a variety of mandates, cultures and operational models, in their efforts to implement environmental and social sustainability measures internally. The pilot project will be carried out in 2015.

37. As an outcome of the pilot project, it will be important to consider how to adjust the framework and the interim guide in order to clarify how economic dimensions need to be incorporated, both to ensure due diligence and outcome effectiveness of United Nations operations and programming and to maximize synergies of actions with strategies for inclusive and sustainable growth.

C. Adapting support to intergovernmental work

38. A range of inter-agency bodies have supported the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda. Various ad hoc and time-bound mechanisms were created for that purpose, notably the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda and its inter-agency technical support team.

39. The technical support team has worked in a novel way to support the Open Working Group throughout its deliberations. Its 55 member entities organized around several lead agencies to prepare issues briefs on the various topics examined by the Open Working Group. This allowed interdisciplinary dialogue within thematically driven coalitions while responding quickly to Member State requests. The technical support team stands ready to assist Member States on an as-needed basis.

40. This lead-agency model may inspire arrangements for United Nations system support to other intergovernmental bodies, notably the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

41. The elaboration of the sustainable development goals has also broadened the work of some existing inter-agency mechanisms. For example, UN-Water has been continuously addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development in its work, albeit in a fairly sectoral manner through its thematic priority areas and task forces. With the advent of the sustainable development goals process, UN-Water has put in place an institutional mechanism to address economic, social and environmental dimensions in a holistic manner, focusing on the entire water cycle. This enabled the provision of technical advice to Member States on the proposed water goal and related targets. UN-Water has also launched an expanded monitoring initiative aimed at helping Member States to review all the proposed water targets.

42. The focus on sustainable development requires enhancing support to intergovernmental bodies. Reports and advice must be based on a keen

understanding of the dynamics between the various dimensions and sectors. They must be grounded in scientific analysis and informed by the expertise and joint reflection of United Nations system organizations. Secretariats must work together to ensure that each governing body is informed of the work being done in other forums and contributes in its area of expertise and mandate.

D. More integrated policy advice

43. Policy advice is another area in which the United Nations system needs to bolster its ability to provide analysis and recommendations to support integrated action across the economic, social and environmental areas, across sectors and between development and other areas, such as humanitarian assistance.

44. For example, the Global Migration Group, which brings together 18 organizations of, or connected to, the United Nations system, promotes better coordination in the application of all relevant international instruments and norms relating to migration. Its work covers a wide range of topics, including labour migration, migration data, migration and health, migration and climate change, and migration and human rights. Apart from sustaining policy cooperation and integration in the field of international migration, the Group also contributes to the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

45. Another example is the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, which comprises five United Nations system entities and plans to provide a comprehensive suite of green economy services at the national level in support of the adoption of transformative economic policies to meet the demands and challenges of the twenty-first century. The Partnership aims to support 30 countries over the next seven years in building national green economy strategies that will generate new jobs and skills, promote clean technologies and reduce environmental risks and poverty.

46. Importantly, efforts to advance collaboration and support integrated approaches must be accelerated at the country level, where there will likely be a demand for support from the United Nations system.

IV. Adapting country-level support as an urgent imperative

47. Some countries have already started reflecting on the implications of the post-2015 agenda on their national development plans and strategies. The United Nations system is being called upon to support such an exercise in some of its programme countries.

48. Following the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, there will be a strong expectation that the United Nations will adjust its policy advice and technical assistance to help countries to gear national development efforts towards the new goals and targets. This in turn will inform the strategic content of the next generation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks "Delivering as one" programmes, and broader United Nations engagement at all levels. A survey of programme countries conducted for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities[1] showed that the efforts of the United Nations system were seen

[1] Survey questions are available from www.un.org/en/ecosoc/qcpr/pdf/qcpr_programme-

as currently focused on achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Countries will likewise expect the sustainable development goals to guide the United Nations system.

49. The survey reveals that Governments continue to consider the United Nations development system as a relevant partner across the various areas of the future sustainable development goals. Sustainable development is seen as one of the areas in which United Nations assistance to countries has been most significant and effective (after gender, health, environment and governance). Sustainable development also features among the areas that Governments consider most important for United Nations support in the coming four years (after economic growth and employment and the environment). This reinforces the mandate to mainstream sustainable development approaches in the United Nations system.

50. The survey shows that Governments would like the United Nations to make greater efforts to support national capacities and use national institutions. This would be consistent with the focus of the sustainable development goals on institutional effectiveness and accountability, especially as articulated under goal 16.

51. At the country level, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework is used in most countries as the strategic planning tool for Governments and the United Nations system to come together and plan the joint support provided to United Nations country teams. The Framework is likewise an important tool for collectively mainstreaming sustainable development approaches and preparing the United Nations system for helping countries to implement the new development agenda.

52. A preliminary analysis of the current generation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (those initiated in 2013-2014) showed that, taken together, they addressed the "unfinished business" of the Millennium Development Goals and began to shift focus to the proposed sustainable development goals, albeit with some variations. This analysis points to the need for a more robust scoping and understanding of United Nations capacity to deliver a universal and integrated sustainable development agenda in various country contexts.

53. Overall, implementing the recommendations from the quadrennial comprehensive policy review will be critical, as improved coordination will also allow drawing from the expertise and resources of various organizations. Collaboration should also include entities engaged in economic development and humanitarian affairs.

54. Providing integrated support to the achievement of sustainable development goals will require other adjustments in the focus and working methods of the United Nations system. The survey conducted for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review showed that a significant number of countries considered that some United Nations organizations could be more effective in supporting countries in addressing problems of inequality and social exclusion. Nonetheless, low-income countries considered the United Nations to be highly relevant to their development needs. These findings should be carefully examined.

country_survey-2014.pdf.

55. Coherence initiatives, such as the "Delivering as one" initiative, now implemented in 44 countries, seem to have improved the performance of the United Nations system in this regard. The "Delivering as one" initiative has also helped to mainstream such cross-cutting issues as the environment, the decent work agenda and human rights. The initiative may thus presumably help to advance more integrated policies and, ultimately, sustainable development approaches. It should be consolidated, notably through the implementation of standard operating procedures, in order to effectively translate integrated programming into joint operational delivery across the agencies, funds and programmes.

56. These various efforts will be bolstered by the work of the new working group on sustainable development of the United Nations Development Group. An important issue that will need to be addressed relates to the role of the United Nations in advocating and advising on the implementation of the sustainable development goals in developed countries.

57. Member States will need to encourage and guide these efforts through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, on the basis of reflection during dialogues of the Economic and Social Council on the long-term positioning of the United Nations system and solid reporting on United Nations performance in mainstreaming sustainable development approaches.

V. Strategic plans and frameworks to drive integration

58. Ultimately, sustainable development should be the guiding framework for United Nations system organizations. The first two reports of the Secretary-General emphasized that, for that to happen, sustainable development must be embedded in organizations' strategic plans and frameworks. It was also acknowledged that not all organizations required major adjustments, since several mandates had already called upon the United Nations system to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner, notably in the wake of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Still, in making the transition to a transformative post-2015 development agenda, sustained efforts will be needed to ensure that all strategic plans are aligned with the sustainable development goals, including strategic objectives and results and indicators for reviewing progress. The target indicators being developed in the sustainable development goals framework will help to update the indicators used by various organizations in reviewing progress and implementing their strategic plans.

59. Reviewing and adjusting strategic plans entails practical and technical challenges. Some organizations have just completed the elaboration of their strategic plans or their midterm review of implementation. In some cases, this has entailed adjusting plans to reflect other mandates given to the organization. Governing bodies and organizations might be experiencing planning fatigue. The need to assess the implications of the post-2015 development agenda should be made clear; this will require coordination on the part of Member States and the United Nations system.

60. However, there are examples of organizations reviewing the implications of the proposed sustainable development goals. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, for example, has initiated an internal stocktaking and visioning exercise to ensure that it plans for long-term results and adapts to the framework of

the post-2015 development agenda. It should be noted that the longer time horizon of the sustainable development goals is not easily reconciled with the strategic planning cycle, which is often too short to fully realize gains in the implementation of sustainable development activities. The United Nations Children's Fund is also in the process of reviewing its strategic plan, in preparation for the midterm review in the following year, to assess whether it is coherent, makes the needed linkages between various areas, is measurable and links to the work of other organizations. Upcoming planning and midterm reviews should be fully used to gear strategic plans towards sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda. There may also be a need to conduct ad hoc reviews to determine whether adjustments to strategic frameworks and budgets, among others, are needed.

Box 1

Adapting United Nations system strategic plans to sustainable development and the sustainable development goals

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) recently reviewed each of the seven subprogrammes of its 2014-2019 strategic plan to examine their alignment with goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), as well as other goals interlinked through relevant targets. To that end, UN-Habitat is prepared to deliver technical assistance on issues of security of tenure and slum prevention, non-motorized transport, land-use efficiency and other outcomes of urban planning, multipurpose public space and urban finance to address the 10 targets proposed under goal 11. The results of that review have already been integrated in the proposed work programme and budget for the biennium 2016-2017.

The strategic plan of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for 2014-2017 recognizes the need for greater links between environmental sustainability, poverty eradication, inclusive growth, governance, resilience and gender equality. Since 2013, UNDP has taken steps to operationalize the strategic plan and better mainstream the three dimensions of sustainable development across its policy, programming, and partnership opportunities, including through the promotion of South-South and triangular cooperation. Strategic planning objectives are now being tracked through a global integrated results and resources framework with targets and indicators that include sustainable development results definitions. UNDP is also creating a corporate planning system that focuses on the needs of country offices and offers a single, unified and user-friendly platform for planning, monitoring and reporting sustainable development policy and programming across all levels of the organization. Its own quadrennial comprehensive policy review implementation plan, which is updated and reported on a quarterly basis, supports this process at all levels.

UNDP has completed a complementary reorganization of its bureaux, offices and staffing, in part to ensure mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development and break down work silos across development themes. In 2015, new social and environmental standards were launched and will become an indicator in the integrated results and resources framework.

In 2013, States members of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) renewed its mandate to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development with a view to more explicitly pursuing integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in UNIDO activities.

The mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development, both in the renewed mandate of UNIDO and across the United Nations system as a whole, have been underpinned by a burgeoning results- and impact-based orientation at the policy, operational and management level.

On that basis, UNIDO established a new integrated results and performance framework as the basis for long-term results-based management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems. Aligned with the global sustainable development agenda, as well as with the overarching corporate goals of transparency, effectiveness and efficiency, the framework is being introduced into the UNIDO programme and budgets document, as well as the new medium-term programme framework for 2016-2019.

Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development has become more prominent in the work of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) since the holding of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. In 2012, the ITU Council, in its resolution 1353, recognized the new global commitment to sustainable development and, in particular, the need for further mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development. In 2014, the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference approved a new strategic plan for the period 2016-2019, which sets out the vision, goals and targets that ITU member States have committed to achieving by 2020 in collaboration with all stakeholders across the information and communications technology (ICT) ecosystem.

Known as the "Connect 2020 agenda", the new set of goals provides ITU membership with a unique framework for action to advance growth, inclusion, sustainability and innovation in the ICT sector and to adopt a unified results-based framework that brings together ITU-led activities under a single set of measurable goals and targets.

Through the new framework, member States have put sustainable development at the centre of the ITU strategy.

61. As discussed previously, with the sustainable development goals comes the need for closer linkages between sectors and organizations and more coordinated and integrated planning. There are several options to consider for strengthening coordination and integrated plans across United Nations entities using established inter-agency mechanisms and in line with existing mandates. Those should be explored.

62. The United Nations system has gained experience in mainstreaming cross-cutting issues, such as gender, into strategic plans. That experience can be built upon to ensure appropriate interlinkages between the work of organizations.

63. In addition to strategic planning, evidence-based evaluations can accelerate and guide the efforts of the United Nations system to mainstream sustainable development and the sustainable development goals in its work.

VI. Reviewing and evaluating the impact of the United Nations system on sustainable development

A. Facilitating system accountability

64. Within the context of the intergovernmental process to elaborate a post-2015 development agenda, Member States are shaping a framework for monitoring and reviewing progress in implementation. Thus far, the focus has been on how to review country progress in implementing the agenda. However, it is also widely recognized that the United Nations system and other development actors are also accountable for how they support the implementation of the sustainable development goals and the broader agenda.

65. A number of intergovernmental mechanisms ensure the accountability of the United Nations system. The General Assembly provides high-level guidance on operational activities for development through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, and the Economic and Social Council keeps United Nations system implementation thereof under review. In addition, individual organizations are accountable to their respective governing bodies.

66. In 2013, the General Assembly, in its resolution 67/290, decided that the high-level political forum on sustainable development would review progress in implementing sustainable development commitments and that its reviews "shall include developed and developing countries, as well as relevant United Nations entities". That line of reporting should not duplicate the existing accountability lines. The future annual report on mainstreaming sustainable development in the work of the United Nations system could be used as a basis for such reviews, depending on Member States' guidance.

67. More generally, the sustainable development goals, targets and indicators will provide a yardstick against which to evaluate development progress. It will be important to determine how they can best be used to evaluate the system's contribution to the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. A study to test the evaluability of the goals could be conducted as soon as the agenda is adopted, so that Member States have the framework necessary to evaluate the United Nations system in 5, 10 or 15 years. It will be important to establish a baseline.

68. The 2014 report of the Secretary-General highlighted the role of independent evaluations and inspections in promoting and tracking the mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development. There is a potentially important role for evaluation to play in enhancing learning and accountability in United Nations system reviews under the high-level political forum and elsewhere. The United Nations system has been increasingly undertaking joint approaches to evaluation, which can help to better integrate the three dimensions.

69. An interim coordination mechanism for system-wide evaluation of operational activities for development has been created by the quadrennial comprehensive policy review. It is intended to progressively enable the assessment of the United Nations system's response to challenges and priorities and achievement of the internationally agreed development goals in specific areas.

70. Overall, evaluation capacity across the United Nations system remains fairly uneven. The United Nations Evaluation Group is working to strengthen the evaluation functions of the United Nations system through the establishment of evaluation norms and standards, clear guidance on how to integrate gender responsiveness in evaluation systems, accountability frameworks that include peer reviews and system-wide action plan performance indicators, and further professionalization of evaluation. Reinforcing the capacity of the various evaluation entities across the system may give Member States an important evidence base with which to review and assess the work of the United Nations in their respective bodies.

71. Evaluating whether the United Nations system is adequately supporting the achievement of the sustainable development goals and mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development in its work will require a slightly different kind of exercise and skill set. New methodologies and tools, training and resources may be required. Along with a robust evaluation capacity, organizations need to have systems in place to collect and analyse the requisite data.

Box 2
Evaluation to inform implementation

To inform the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in partnership with the United Nations Evaluation Group, is carrying out a systematic review of gender in development. By reviewing more than 300 existing evaluations, the study will synthesize evidence on what works in implementing policies, programmes and projects to achieve gender equality and help to integrate gender responsiveness in national evaluation and systems.

72. The Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has studied the monitoring and evaluation with regard to the Millennium Development Goals with a view to providing lessons learned for the post-2015 era. Importantly, it was seen that the Goals helped to significantly increase the amount, quality and accessibility of data. However, they lacked a strong evidence-based evaluation function for periodic review and mid-course correction. As a preliminary recommendation, OIOS

recommends that the Secretary-General formulate an overarching strategy and action plan to support coherent, coordinated and timely monitoring and evaluation with regard to the post-2015 development agenda, together with the capacity development needed to support decision-making, along the path to achieving the sustainable development goals.

B. Helping Member States to track and evaluate their own progress

73. In 2014, and earlier in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, Member States called upon the United Nations system to further strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation, in accordance with their national policies and priorities. The United Nations Evaluation Group is reflecting on how to respond to that mandate in the most rapid and effective way. Typically, United Nations system evaluation entities support countries in strengthening their own evaluation policies and systems. Capacity development should also include building skills and methods for national evaluation institutions, professional associations and practitioners, as well as systems for evaluation based on evidence-based recommendations to inform mid-course corrections.

74. Some Member States may ask the United Nations to assist in reviewing and evaluating their own progress towards the goals and targets for 2030. The precise contours of the architecture for reviewing progress in implementing the post-2015 development agenda will be developed in the intergovernmental negotiations, but it is already clear that the review framework will be voluntary and aimed at increasing effectiveness and exchanging lessons learned. It will make use of the entire United Nations system architecture. The Secretary-General, in his synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda, suggested that the principal components of a review and monitoring framework could include a country-led, national component for accountability; a regional component for peer review; a global component for knowledge-sharing, as a forum for participatory, multi-stakeholder review; and a thematic component to chart global progress at regular intervals to help to identify challenges and bottlenecks and to mobilize action to address them.

75. Should the review architecture to be adopted in September 2015 have similar components, the United Nations will need to help to orchestrate and aggregate the many reviews conducted in various parts of the system on specific goals and targets.

76. Many such review and monitoring platforms already exist. The high-level political forum was established as a core platform for reviewing progress. The General Assembly is the overarching policy body and guides integrated and coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits, as well as follow-up to some specific outcomes. The Economic and Social Council assists with that follow-up and can orchestrate and coordinate the work of the United Nations system in various areas. A range of intergovernmental bodies also review progress on specific aspects of the post-2015 development agenda, as do various treaty-monitoring and other expert-level bodies.

77. It will be important to instil a sense of architecture in the existing arrangements and to draw from the reporting to existing platforms in order to ensure that the high-level political forum benefits from a holistic perspective. A platform for reviewing progress on the post-2015 agenda would need to include Governments and various other stakeholders and base its work on solid data and scientific

evidence. The United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda and its technical support team can help to take stock of existing arrangements that meet such criteria, to support Member States in such an exercise.

Box 3

Reviewing progress on specific sustainable development goals

The Committee on World Food Security is emerging as the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together on food security and nutrition for all. It has a natural advantage in overseeing progress on those goals and targets related to food security and nutrition. Three distinctive and unique features contribute to the Committee's legitimacy as a policy review and oversight mechanism: (a) the multi-stakeholder institutional structure, which provides the basis for meaningful participation by all relevant stakeholders; (b) the regular inclusion of structured food security and nutrition-related expertise in policy dialogue, which allows the Committee to conduct its consultation and negotiation processes with a solid base of evidence and practice; and (c) the linking of multi-stakeholder consultation and evidence-based knowledge to decision-making, which provides the basic science-policy framework for effective implementation by a variety of actors at the global, regional and national levels.

VII. Engaging in partnerships for sustainable development

78. Intuitive to the sustainable development approach is strong engagement with multi-stakeholder partnerships, networks and coalitions of actors around specific themes.

79. The United Nations now has a long history of engagement in multi-stakeholder partnerships. With its presence at the country level, and now more interlinked through the standard operating procedures on "delivering as one", the United Nations system is able to co-design programmes with stakeholders, facilitate nationally led, inclusive dialogues and provide a platform for shared capacities and operations. Much support has also been directed at forging South-South and triangular partnerships. Some experiences have proved successful in mobilizing resources, improving programme delivery and helping to build consensus around sensitive issues. However, such initiatives need to be carefully built, overseen and implemented, so as to ensure that they promote systemic change and do not exacerbate fragmentation of financing and institutions. Their advancement of the three dimensions of sustainable development needs to be ensured.

80. Evidence shows that multi-stakeholder efforts, combined with official development assistance and complemented by South-South and triangular cooperation, can leverage financial and other resource flows from both the public and private sectors, as well as mobilize technology, research and human capacity. Such initiatives as "Every woman, every child", Sustainable Energy for All and the

Zero Hunger Challenge have shown that, with leadership, coherence and accountability, the multi-stakeholder partnership model works in mobilizing new funding, catalysing innovation and achieving scale.

81. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives often possess extensive knowledge and expertise on the implementation of sustainable development commitments, including on best practices, governance structures and implementation of methodologies. Ease of access to such vast knowledge will be crucial for building, managing and leveraging successful and sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships for achieving the sustainable development goals.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

82. Strengths, challenges and gaps identified in the 2013 and 2014 reports of the Secretary-General remain relevant to the current discussion on mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development. The impact of the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals is already being felt as it drives the elaboration of more integrated approaches to implementation. The United Nations system needs to further strengthen its efforts to prepare for helping countries to implement the universal development agenda and review progress at all levels.

83. Coherent intergovernmental oversight and guidance will be essential. The high-level political forum for sustainable development, as a core platform, the Charter of the United Nations and other bodies and intergovernmental platforms will all play a role in reviewing implementation. The United Nations system must support their work in a coordinated fashion.

84. It is suggested that Member States:

(a) Invite the Secretary-General to map United Nations system support in the areas addressed by the proposed sustainable development goals and encourage reflection, including within the dialogues of the Economic and Social Council, on how to ensure that such support is provided in an integrated and coordinated manner, reflecting interrelations between the goals;

(b) Invite United Nations system organizations and their governing bodies to assess the asymmetry between economic, social and environmental issues in their work and the operational framework of the United Nations system and its various entities;

(c) Call upon the United Nations system to make further efforts to align strategic plans with the future sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda and integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions;

(d) Invite the United Nations system to undertake more systematic initiatives to break work silos, encourage staff to engage in intersectoral dialogue, and develop new approaches to supporting integrated policymaking and collaboration, both within and outside their own organizations. Organizations should address internal incentives that restrict the recognition of outputs produced jointly by some entities and intersectoral lending of staff time, or ensure that staff reporting and evaluation frameworks put a premium on collaboration outside one's unit;

(e) Encourage United Nations system organizations to implement the Environment Management Group framework for advancing environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations system;

(f) Invite the Secretary-General, as part of the next survey for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, to seek the views of programme countries on how effectively the United Nations system is supporting them in developing integrated policies and institutions to achieve the sustainable development goals and to report on operational aspects in the context of the next review;

(g) Invite United Nations system organizations to reflect on innovative arrangements to support the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and other intergovernmental platforms, building on the technical support team's experience and approach;

(h) Request the Secretary-General to report on progress to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, and to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.